

African tulip tree (436)

Summary

- Worldwide distribution. In Australia and many Pacific island countries.
- An invasive tree especially in high rainfall disturbed areas along roads, waterways, and at forest margins where it competes with native vegetation. It also competes with crop production. Alternative view is that it revegetates disturbed areas, providing habitat for native birds and animals.
- Grows up to 35 m with spreading crown, slightly buttressed trunk, compound leaves with 11-15 leaflets, each up to 15 cm long, in opposite pairs. Flowers in large dense clusters at tips of branches, individually enclosed in boat-shaped, leaf-like structures (sepals). Petals reddish-orange, fused together, somewhat tulip-like. Seedpods flattened, brown, erect, releasing up to 500 light, winged seeds.
- Spread: masses of wind-dispersed seed and by suckering.
- Biosecurity: regulate entry of trees and their distribution locally.
- Natural enemies: non-specific caterpillars, and the fungus *Ceratocystis* are reported.
- Cultural control: pull or dig out seedlings, but only when young, otherwise suckers grow from the roots.
- Chemical control: in Australia: triclopyr + picloram; triclopyr + picloram + aminopyralid; glyphosate (and Fiji).

Common Name

African tulip tree. It is also known as fireball, or flame of the forest.

Scientific Name

Spathodea campanulata. It is a member of the Bignoniaceae.



Photo 1. Compact stand of African tulip trees, *Spathodea campanulata*.



Photo 2. African tulip trees, *Spathodea campanulata*, growing in valleys in the low hills, western Fiji.



Photo 3. Solitary, mature African tulip tree, *Spathodea campanulata*. Note the slightly buttressed trunk.



Photo 4. Clumps of flowers of African tulip tree, *Spathodea campanulata*, at the end of the branches.



Photo 5. Young African tulip trees, *Spathodea campanulata*, showing compound leaves (right) and flowers.



Photo 6. Characteristic erect seed pods of African tulip tree, *Spathodea campanulata*.



Photo 7. Close-up, flowers, African tulip trees, *Spathodea campanulata*.



Photo 8. Seeds and seed pods, African tulip trees, *Spathodea campanulata*.

AUTHORS Grahame Jackson & Aradhana Deesh

¹Information from Warea Orapa (2017) Impact and management of invasive alien plants in Pacific island communities. In: Ellison CA, et al. (eds) *Invasive Alien Plants*. CAB International. (<https://www.cabi.org/ISC/FulltextPDF/2017/20173322107.pdf>); and African tulip tree *Spathodea campanulata*. Brisbane City Council weed identification tool. (<https://weeds.brisbane.qld.gov.au/weeds/african-tulip-tree/>); and Weeds of Australia, Biosecurity Queensland Edition. Queensland Government. (https://keyserver.lucidcentral.org/weeds/data/media/html/spathodea_campanulata.htm); and from *Spathodea campanulata* (African tulip tree) (2019). CAB Invasive Species Compendium. (<https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/51139>). Photos 1,3&5 Forest and Kim Starr, Starr Environmental, Bugwood.org. Photo 4 Joy Viola, Northeastern University, Bugwood.org. Photo 6 Tony Pemas, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org.

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